

9 Jan 74

THE USES AND MISUSES OF MILITARY FORCE
IN THE DECADE AHEAD

The utility of military force for furthering political ends has diminished in the last 15 years and with it has gone the traditional rationale for a standing military. How did this lessening of utility occur and what does it portend for the future?

First and most obvious, the advent of nuclear weapons, followed by the achievement of Soviet-U.S. nuclear parity, has rendered unthinkable the option of resolving superpower differences by means of military force. The closeness of the ties between each superpower and its major allies has enlarged considerably the group of sovereign countries who recognize the possibly suicidal consequences of using either conventional or nuclear force to solve their problems.

Second, the very real limitations of a major military power, trying to exercise its will over a minor power through the use of military force, were demonstrated in both Korea and Vietnam. This was partly because the major powers almost always had to fight a limited war for limited objectives against a minor power fighting a total war for survival, and partly because the dispersal of technology permitted the small powers access to enough sophisticated equipment to give a major power a very difficult time.

Third, there is an increased worldwide concern for improved national economic, rather than political, position. Politicians are concerned with a steady improvement of their country's standard of living, based on potential to improve and not on a comparison with the standards of country X or country Y. Thus, in what is a non-zero sum game, military force is less applicable to furthering these economic desires.

Fourth, the acceptability of the use of military force has declined in the Western world. Instant worldwide communications have engendered a greater sense of world community. A greater appreciation of the horrors of war, its apparent futility, and a professed humanitarianism have contributed to the popularity of detente.

It would be a mistake, however, for us to overstate this idea of diminishing utility for military force. Many countries still feel they can benefit from the use of force because there are many others who feel insecure under the threat of force. They have only to look to the Middle East, the continuing strife in Cambodia, tensions in India-Pakistan, and the many other smaller conflicts in recent years, whose focus seems to be in the more developed Third World countries rather than the very underdeveloped ones. Major power interest in these potential conflicts has been considerable. There is always the danger that conflict will lead to superpower involvement (The Middle East situation is a classic example.) or that a major power will obtain dominant influence through

the use of either direct or surrogate military power. The effect on vital raw material sources and world trade patterns would be of concern to all.

As a consequence, it appears that military force planning in the decade ahead will be dominated by three missions:

First, the retention of strategic nuclear deterrence, but with consideration of alternatives to mutual assured destruction. In many ways this concept is responsible for the public apathy or opposition to military forces.

Second, the maintenance of a military balance in Europe. Despite the greater importance today of political and economic factors in deterring a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, the availability and strength of our military forces is an important reassurance to our European allies of the link between U.S. nuclear power and the concomitant prohibitive cost of an invasion.

Third, the need to maintain some form of military balance in the Third World, both to deter major power adventurism and to contain possible intra-Third World conflicts.

If these missions present a new or changed raison d'etre for the military, then their commonality (deterrence rather than defense or active warfare) may change significantly the thrust of U.S. military force planning. This change will pose some difficult problems which we must be prepared to address.

Deterrence forces are more difficult to structure than defensive forces. If we mean by deterrence, forces which will discourage an enemy by confronting him with unacceptable risks,

we are working with the enemy's intentions. Defensive forces on the other hand, are designed to counter the enemy's capabilities and thus reduce our cost and risk in the event deterrence fails. The proverbial response that because enemy intentions can change quickly we must base our plans on enemy capabilities is not helpful. Technology has pushed the costs of weapons so high that we have only two choices if we plan forces against a potential adversary's capability: limit the areas we are prepared to defend (Western Europe for example); and be only partially prepared for worldwide defense requirements. Whichever choice we make, we are, in effect, estimating intentions. We are estimating either that Europe is the primary threat area or that we can take a chance with thin forces on all fronts. In essence this is part of the difficulty in acknowledging the limited power of the United States. We hope that our force structure will somehow be adequate if we must defend. Sometimes, however, we find we have to redefine the threat downward in order to be reassured. Should we not give more attention to the realistic requirements of deterring conflict?

For us in uniform this is most difficult. Our primary force sizing technique has been the analysis of specific scenarios. Deterrence is less amenable to concise scenario definition and analysis. This is true in part because deterrence relies on perceptions. There are many perceptions we must consider; our own, the Soviets, a Third World power hoping

for Soviet assistance, and a Third World power acting alone. The perception by a Third World country of the relative balance between us and the Soviets and our relative ability to influence the situation by force is important. This perception may differ from either the Soviet or U.S. perception of the same situation. Of course, it's possible that more than one of these perceptions may be at work simultaneously. Unfortunately, we do not know much about the impact of military force on perceptions like these. In the Navy, for instance, there is always a tendency when called upon for gunboat diplomacy to send the nearest ship. If there is a choice, this decision is always in favor of the largest and most powerful ship. Yet there are times when the largest and most powerful may not be the most credible or the most applicable to any particular situation. Supersonic airplanes are likely to pose only small threat to a very underdeveloped nation, whereas a Marine helicopter assault on the capital of a country may be very meaningful indeed. Overall, we need considerably more study on the operative factors of military presence or deterrence.

Another substantial problem is selling this concept to the Congress and the public given the difficulty of defining and understanding deterrence. If we talk of deterrence in terms of balance or in Dr. Janowitz's term of "stabilizing", rather than in terms of defense and superiority, the obvious

conclusion will be that we need less. If we ask for less we will probably get much less. In view of this, the best bureaucratic strategy may well be to continue to play up the threat and ask for forces for warfighting capability in the hope that we will have enough for a deterrent strategy.

There is also a great danger today in the euphoria, caused by an imperfect understanding of detente, which pervades in the Congress. After sitting through three days of Pacem in Terris with Congressmen, intellectuals, businessmen, and other community leaders, I can assure you that there is a lot of illogical or uninformed thinking about the term "detente." Detente is a fragile, changing thing. A column in the Washington Post recently stated, "detente is finished." because on September 27th the Soviet Union knew what day the Arabs were going to attack Israel and did not tell us. I believe the author took an overly simplistic and idealized view of detente. He made no allowance for the constantly changing nature of any relationship. Detente consists of both forward and backward movements within the boundaries of a state of relative trust and confidence. Our present state of detente is nowhere near the level of trust and confidence which would permit the revelation of that sort of information.

What would affect the present detente adversely? The development of a military imbalance (conventional and strategic) between the U.S. and the Soviet Union? The perception of increased vulnerability to attack by the other? The awareness by one of a marked military advantage over the other? Any

of these would likely cause a breakdown in detente. History has not show many cases of countries forsaking an advantage over a rival. I believe this, though I consider the U.S. the most magnanimous country in the history of the world. Not many would have pressed only for a policy of containment, let alone detente, even while possessing a monopoly of nuclear weapons for over five years.

Furthermore, the Soviets have different needs for military forces. If I were a Soviet military leader, I might be reluctant to reduce my forces when I considered my responsibilities with respect to internal affairs and in the eastern European nations. If I were a Soviet political leader and accepted Soviet ways of doing things, the tradition of using force to preserve domestic order and security would make me reluctant to reduce military forces. The Soviet Union does not have the anti-military tradition we inherited from our founding fathers.

I also see no reason to believe that the Soviets will not exercise force to threaten other people. They are clearly building up their Navy beyond what I believe could be any legitimate defensive requirement. Even if they do not purposely exercise force, possession of large forces is sometimes perceived as a threat by other nations. We need to think more about such possible threats.

A few days ago I was talking with a civilian academician involved in a study of Japanese security requirements. Inevitably the subject of the very long jugular from the Persian Gulf to Japan came up. I asked what he would have the Japanese do. He said that this vital supply line was so extended and so difficult to defend that there was no point in building naval forces to protect it. I suggest this is a misunderstanding of perceptions of military power. There is a fatal difference between a zero threshold at which another power can pose a threat with military force and a 10, 20, or 30 percent capability.

A few weeks ago, the British newspapers reported that Norway has discovered oil in her territorial waters. The Norwegians, however, appear to me to feel that the Norwegian Sea is a Soviet lake; so they have elected to develop those oil fields only in the very southern part of their coast line. We need to be sure that we understand more about the perceptions of threat, how they affect political and economic decisions.

The search for meaningful uses of military forces in the next decade is not a simple problem and its solution cannot be found by the military acting alone. I have attempted briefly to state the dilemmas facing the military establishment today and to outline some of the considerations in developing a meaningful future strategy. In a sense we in the Navy are at a crossroads. The decisions made today will shape the Navy of tomorrow. Can we design the right Navy for tomorrow's challenges?



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20350

IN REPLY REFER TO
OP- 009D3
Ser 73-0044
22 Feb 1974

From: Chief of Naval Operations
To: Naval War College, Newport, Rhode Island 02840
Subj: Material submitted for security review; Return of
Ref: (a) Your ltr of 17 January 1974
Encl: (1) Speech: President of Naval War College
The Uses and Misuses of Military Force in the
Decade Ahead.

1. As requested by reference (a), enclosure (1) has been reviewed for military security, factual accuracy and established policy and is returned,

- ☐ Cleared for open publication
- ☒ Cleared for open publication as amended
- ☐ Not cleared for open publication for the following reason(s):


F. A. BROWN
By direction

THE USES AND MISUSES OF MILITARY FORCE
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CLEARED AS AMENDED
FOR OPEN PUBLICATION
FEB 1974 10

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D3 24-0044

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Enclosure (1) to CNO Ltr. serial
00973/73-0044

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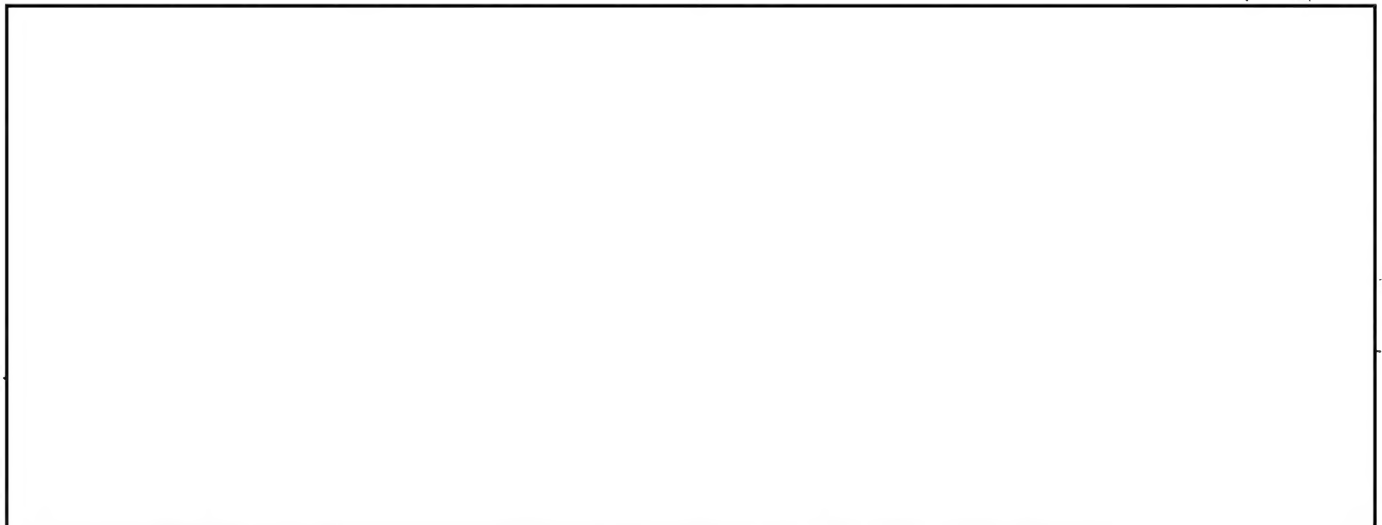
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